CHAPTER-II
THE PSYCHO-SOCIO DYNAMICS OF RAPE OR WHY RAPE OCCURS

The Sourcebook on Violence against Women maintains that violence is a means by which “individuals or groups can maintain or advance their interests”. Talking of sexual violence against women in any form, we can say that male aggression is a means of social control or a means of consolidation of patriarchal control over women. Fear induced among women by crimes of violence such as rape, definitely keep women in fear of men and therefore under control. If power consists in the ability of one individual to influence another, then crimes of violence become a source of power for patriarchy.

I. Rape as the Consequence of Gender Inequality

The feminist explanation of violence against women as result of male-dominated social structure and socialization practices of patriarchal societies is convincing. Thus, violence against women is the result of the subordinate position of women in our society. As suggested by Ellis, “rape is the male response to social inequality between men and women”. And according to feminists, rightly, rape is a weapon of control and domination, and not of mere sexual gratification. This is in keeping with theories such as those of Russell who believe rape to be the outcome of a rape-supportive culture. Rape is the ultimate expression of brute majoritarianism which seeks to impose its power on those who are deemed children of a lesser God by virtue of gender, social status or community.
Susan Brownmiller also believes that the function of rape is to keep women subordinate to men. She describes rape as a phenomenon prevalent from the prehistoric to the present times. And she says that it has “played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (*Against Our Wills*).\(^4\)

The occurrence of rape is certainly linked to the esteem of women in society. Since gender is associated with power or the lack of it, it is definitely also linked to the safety of women in society. Societies that teach men to be sexually aggressive are less likely to be rape – free and more likely to be aggressive to their women.\(^5\)

One can see that violence is the outcome of a gendered society. That we live in a gendered society in which divisions, privileges and power are distributed along lines of gender difference, is a truth none can deny. Gender inequality then becomes the major determinant that decides the possibilities of violence against women in any society. Rape, too, like any other form of violence, is more likely in a society where women’s status is low and patriarchal character of society is highlighted. The theory that justifies lower esteem and status of one gender over another, has universally explained that biological sex is the primary determinant of gender. Which is to say that biological difference leads to difference in status and gender-role stereotypication. However as Michael Kimmel, a sociologist convincingly explains such biological determinism only misleads. Taking the example of the child Dominican pseudohermaphrodites, he says they make an easy transition to the other gender on being conditioned accordingly. This proves that the theory that
correlates sex with gender is absolutely unacceptable.\textsuperscript{6}

Kimmel offers a further insight by suggesting that across cultures, definitions of masculinity and femininity differ. If sex had solely determined gender, it would not be so. Besides level of gender inequality also differ from one society to another. This goes to suggest the genesis of gender is in gender inequality itself. Gender difference as a phenomenon is the corollary of gender inequality and not vice-versa. Rape, thus is a crime not of sex but of gender.

The creation of gender difference and socialization into separate sex roles, is not simply a creation of nomenclature but is an exercise in dispensation of authority. Which gender is the privileged one; which one will dominate; which will be aggressive and powerful are all determined through the notion of difference. And when it comes to a crime of aggression like rape, gender plays a crucial role in the power-politics at work in a patriarchy. It vindicates the will of one gender over another; denies space; rights and justice to the other. And finally amounts to a violation of human rights.\textsuperscript{7}

The “images of the fragmented body” are identified by Lacan as the signifiers of what psychoanalysis terms aggressivity. The mutilated body in representations of art, then is the emblem of discursive aggression seen in representations. Thus, violence becomes an inherent condition of its subjectivity.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{II. Rape as denial of bodily rights and result of objectification of women}

Rape is a crime of extreme violence in which a biologically
privileged body (only in terms of the ability to impregnate, not to bear), in most cases the male body (estd. by various studies cf. Kimmel), violates and subordinates the other.\(^9\) The antagonism of corporeality, this conflict of bodies, is a game of power, where the privileged gender uses force and the body itself to attain power, pleasure and to put the other in its place. It is the ultimate form of power-play in all its nakedness and brutality as it attacks, violates the body and marks it for the future. It is criminal in its \textit{denial of the bodily rights to the gender in question}, as the body is the seat of all sensual perceptions and the first and primary medium through which we experience the world. As a denial of bodily rights, then it becomes the most heinous form of human rights violation.

While violence is a crime primarily committed against the body, it compels us to probe the mind, the psychology behind such a crime. The body interacts with the world and it is for this reason that all violence committed against it is of crucial import. It reveals the ailing state of society around the victims and draws attention to the need to do something about it.

Narratives are therefore, not only about the victims of violence, but in a big way try and reveal the world around. Therefore, this study is not only about the victims of violence but also about the world around, its motivations, its psyche and its aggression. Rape, then is a crime that pits women against men and the individual against society.

In most societies, female sexuality has been viewed as a commodity, and not as a justifiable, understood aspect of existence. This commodification or objectification of women’s sexuality suits patriarchal society and is the outcome of patriarchy’s desire to control power.
Canadian researchers Lorenne Clark and Debra lewis believe that when women are viewed as private property, their sexual and reproductive capacities become the sole qualities that give them value. Thus, their beauty, desirability and sex become the index of desirable femininity in society. Objectification therefore becomes an alibi for the facilitation of brutal and inhuman behaviour, which may be used as a justification to torture an enemy during war or for raping women.

III. The Biological or Physiological Explanation of Rape

The biological or physiological explanation of rape seems acceptable to a large extent. According to the Source book of Violence, rape can be the outcome of pressures of natural selection on men to reproduce, combined with attempts by females to control the identity of their partners. However, as has been observed, it is not the urge to reproduce that encourages some men to rape. The urge to gain sexual gratification is more urgent than anything else.11

The other explanation, regarding the urge to control the choice of mates by women, seems to be a more provocative factor, as it is directly linked to the question of patriarchal power. Rape amounts to wrestling control over a woman’s desires for another man, or the desire to abstain. Thus, the purpose of rape is to control a woman’s body against her will.12

Some literary texts that exemplify the operation of these factors are Mala Sen’s Bandit Queen, ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’ by Suchitra Bhattacharya, Mridula Garg’s Kathgulab and Pratibha Ray’s Yajnaseni, Krishna Sobti’s Surajmukhi Andhery Ke and Bani Basu’s The Fallen Man are a case in point. In most of these works, we see the male urge to
control the women’s right to choice of a mate. In *Bandit Queen*, Phoolan’s father marries her off to an old man Puttilal and is the first one to deny her the right over herself. Thereafter begins a chain of rapes on her body triggered by various motives, but all of them boil down to controlling the woman’s body and the identity of her partners. Phoolan’s body also becomes a catalyst in the power game between two castes: the Thakurs and the fishermen i.e. Mallahs (lower castes). This is illustrated in the clash between Babu Singh Gujar, who is a Gujar and equal to the thakurs and Vikram Mallah who is of the ‘sudra’, mallah (fisherman) caste like Phoolan.

In Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab*, Smita is raped first by her Jija and then her psychiatrist-husband James attempts to rape her. The iteration of the crime of rapes here too smacks of the use of brutal force to overpower and circumscribe female sexuality.

**IV The Role of Social Learning as a Catalyst in Rape**

There is consensus amongst sociologists and anthropologists about the theory of social learning with regards to its role in triggering off violence against women. This theory is also often called the theory of inter-generational transmission of violence. According to this theory, violence is learned in the context of socialization in the family. Bandura (1978) suggests that violence may be inherited from three primary sources: the *family, culture and subculture, and the media*. One can see interconnectedness between these forces. We cannot deny the inter-relatedness between these social units.

Aggression is a social value learnt in the process of growing up in a
family. This is a truth we are all aware of. A child, who grows up exposed to the father’s aggression against his mother and other members, is more likely to be violent and aggressive. Aggression easily teaches a child to take what is not rightfully his/hers. Likelihood of such a child growing up to be rapist is quite possible. This socialization of the child in the family and neighborhood is a crucial factor that teaches aggression.

Psychologists such as Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss and Tanaka (1991) have argued that “a hostile home environment may lay the foundation for the potential to be aggressive towards women, sexually or physically, through two paths: (1) hostile attitudes & personality characteristics & (2) a high level of sexual promiscuity that may combine with hostility to lead to sexual aggression”. 16

Learning such values of aggression that do dis-service to individuals and society, is also constantly taking place in the culture or subculture of society. Critics Baron and Straus (1989) argue that the more a society endorses the use of violence or physical force to attain one’s ends, the more likely its approval of acts such as violence against women and even rape. This, socialization beyond the fold of the family, that is within the culture, crucially contributes to encouraging such acts of aggression.

The subculture of violence perspective was developed to explain violent action committed by young, lower-class, minority men in 1958 by Wolfgang.17 This is however, seen as an elitist theory favouring the powerful and influential. Besides, the truth of this theory is contested by the numerous incidents of violence against women, where the perpetrator of a rape or act of violence is a known person, a relative or even a father.
In the context of the post-colonial, this process of learning from the masters and their ways cannot be denied. We see how the post-colonial subject such as Senanayak learns the violent ways of his white masters, to use it for his own gratification vis-à-vis Draupadi, the tribal naxalite in Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Draupadi’.18 The availability of a role model, whether in the context of the family and individual, the master and subject or the main-culture and sub-culture, enables the passing down of the value of violence from one section to another, thereby creating a culture of violence.

Cultural acceptance of violence and its glorification by media are again inter-related phenomena that further the cultural valorization of violence. The rising trend of violence against women is complemented by a parallel glorification and creation of norms that illustrate violence and aggression as ideals.

In an essay titled *Violence, Power and Pleasure: a revisionist reading of Foucault from the victim perspective*, Dean Mac Cannell and Juliet Flower Mac Cannell explore the grounds for violence in society. They infer that the root cause for grounds of violence is a capitalist society as it produces desires without end.19 One can agree completely with this conclusion keeping in view the media and advertising industry’s role in promoting consumerism. The increasing commodification of women’s bodies and the encouragement of women to be objects of desire, through the media send out the message loud and clear to both men and women that women bodies can be preyed upon.

Violent movies are successful at the box-office and violence is so much a part of even children’s TV programmes and cartoons. In India
violent sporting events such as cock-fighting, bull-fighting are very popular. Elsewhere we have heard of Matadors chasing bulls, bear-baiting etc.\textsuperscript{20}

Repeated acts of aggression, the manoeuvering and glorification of acts of violence, desensitize the viewers of the celluloid representations of violence. Notions of manliness, conflating sexuality and violence, do disservice by generating myths in the mind of an impressionable audience. These representations in mass media further attain the fatal end of desensitizing audiences to the agony of victims of such violence.

The issue of mass media’s influence on the audiences is raised by many writers who have dealt with the theme of rape. Mahashweta Devi’s ‘Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai’, raises this issue aptly.\textsuperscript{21} Suchitra Bhattacharya’s \textit{Dahan}, too reveals how the lewd numbers on the screen are actually lived out by the goons in the streets.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, we see how many writers seem to be conscious of the damage done by \textit{sexualized violence}, i.e. media representations that conflate violence and sexual content in the common violent interaction, primarily through the celluloid medium. When an impressionable audience of children and adolescents watches sexualized violence without parental guidance, their lack of critical viewing skills can encourage and further myths and misconceptions about women’s sexuality. This is how such exposures denigrate the status of women, objectify them and make them prone to crimes of rape and other sexual violence.

Shashi Deshpande’s \textit{The Binding Vine}, a novel that deals with a rape incident of a girl, Kalpana by her own uncle, portrays the conflict regarding depiction of sexualized violence on the screen. In a minute
incident, when Vanaa, Urmilla and the kids are watching a film where the heroine is raped by the villain, they debate whether they should allow the kids to watch the film and ultimately give up hoping that the censor-board must have taken care of the matter. Real world aggression, we can see has connections with the way media portrays women in there depictions of rape and sexualized violence. Films where women are portrayed as willingly raped and the perpetrators going scot-free after the act, are likely to encourage this myth in the minds of society that women desire such treatment.

The graphic realism of violence in films and TV programmes further causes damage by desensitizing the viewers. For instance, the way a rape scene is shot by the filmmaker matters. If symbolistic and impressionistic techniques are used, rather than elaborate long shots with microscopic details of any violent incident such as rape, it would make more sense. Close-ups of such representations and elaborate shots lasting several minutes may only further desensitize audiences. Thus, the realms of violence, its portrayal in such a manner, may do greater disservice. Research in the West already indicates this. Explicitness of violent representations desensitizes audiences, is indicated by studies in America. Violence against women, especially rape has been eroticized. Very often romantic novels, soap operas and films highlight these in order to gain popularity.

Media that portrays sexualized violence does disservice to women. However, the silent poison of media representations and advertising world that glamorize women and teach them to be attractive enough for the male gaze are no less dangerous enemies of women. Media that
objectifies and commodifies women and feminine graces, attractiveness etc. for instance through beauty pageants, advertisements that portrays women as sexually promiscuous, do no less disservice as they reduce the respect for women in society and make them easy targets. Thus, beauty pageants; advertisements that use women’s bodies to advertise diverse products use women’s bodies to advertise from soaps to men’s shaving creams, to cars et al. are also responsible for commodifying their sexuality as well. A society exposed to such media, is less likely to hold its women in esteem & more likely to use aggression against them.

The Importance of Context in Media Representations of Violence Against Women and the Role of Narratorial Intervention in Literature that Preaches anti-violence:

Media, whether it is mass media circulating through the small screen (T.V.) or big screen (celluloid representations), is a great educator and disseminator of ideas. In this role of disseminator, it often errs and plays the villain. Violent portrayals needs to be carefully and cautiously censored. Besides the contextualization of these need to be emphasized. For instance, an educational film about extremist and human rights violation may be able to convey ideas to the audience by condemning it. However, ideologues may use the same to motivate feelings of unrest, fundamentalism and violence, and an action-adventure film may portray this violence, so as to glorify and glamorize these values.

While in the mass media and other representations of violence, a word of caution, contextualization and well-directed viewership is elicited, in the case of literary representations, the narratorial intervention and appropriate character evaluation, along with unambiguous condemnation of sexualized violence is required. In Indian writing, one
has witnessed how post-Independence writing has become vocal and assertive in its condemnation of violence against women. From the very subtle, guarded treatises of such violence such as or Yashpal’s *Jhoota Sach* or Phanishwar Nath Renu’s *Maila Anchal*, to Bhisham Sahani’s *Tamas*, and from Krishna Sobti’s *Surajmukhi* to Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab*, a transition from the suggestive and tacit mode to the eloquent condemnation of rape, bodily harm and violence against women has taken place in literature. Character evaluation and endowment of a cognitive voice in the work will help the readers to reach a healthy analysis and ultimately lead to a condemnation of all acts of violence.

Some ways in which writers can endow more meaningfulness to their representation can be through re-reading myths and recasting them with newer meanings as in Pratibha Ray’s *Draupadi* and Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab*. Some other writers have explored the instance of violence in the light of triple-bind of caste-politics in the use of violence against women, as in Mala Sen’s *India’s Bandit Queen*; or explore the element of class as intertwined with the theme as in Mahashwata Devi’s ‘Draupadi’ and Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain*. Many women writers have explored the issue of acquaintance and marital rape in a very useful and analytical manner. Shashi Deshpande’s story, ‘The Intrusion’ and the novel, the *Binding Vine*, Anupama Nirajana’s ‘The Incident & After’; Suchitra Bhattacharya’s ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’ try to negotiate a theme hitherto considered unutterable. Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab* is also a path-breaking milestone in the same direction. Bani Basu’s *Fallen Man* brings out the trauma and psychosis that is there in the mind of such a target, who is victimized by a close relative. On the other hand Pratibha Ray explores the palimpsest of myth, through Draupadi, by humanizing a
demi-goddess and highlighting the intrusion in her life by the condition of embracing five husbands.26

Writers have also tried to highlight the use of rape as a weapon in war-conditions and in episodic social disorganization, as in the Indian context during the Partition. Bhisham Sahani’s Tamas; Rajinder Bedi’s ‘Lajwanti’, Manto’s ‘Open it’ & ‘Cold Meat’, Agneya’s and Lalithambika Antharjanam’s stories are exercises probing the violence in war. All these writers collectively form a unison of condemnation of the use of violence against women in the name of nationalism and community. Unanimous condemnation of communal violence and the politics at work in these representations, openly bares the fabric of the nation and reveals how even the nation endorses such gory happenings in the name of nationalistic fervour. The objectification of women in war becomes amply clear and its holocaust psychological impact on the victim’s mind is vividly portrayed.27

The import of the narratorial voice, or a voice that motivates the viewer’s and reader’s critical abilities, that directs us how to read a work is important and plays a crucial role. Writers play a crucial role in sensitization of the readers to the awareness that female sexuality is problematic because it lies at the centre of patriarchal power. As long as patriarchy turns a blind eye to this, the problem of crimes of violence against women will remain unresolved. In post-colonial Indian writing, there is a considerable body of work that seems to point to the traditions and practices of Indian society that have buried the question of women’s autonomous sexuality and the linked question of selfhood. Through references to mythological figures such as Draupadi or Sita or by
comparing contemporary women to these mythological characters, writers have tried to highlight the unresolved dilemma of women’s existence.

Writers try to explore the two-pronged weapon of shame and honour with which patriarchal society manages to put the blame on its women even vis-à-vis crimes of violence by men such as rape. Shame and concern for maintaining honour first circumscribe women to inner spaces. And when vulnerable women are attacked and such crimes are committed against them, the same weapons are used to intimidate them into silence. Whether it is Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga*, Suchitra Bhattacharya’s *Dahan*, ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’; or Anupama Niranjana’s ‘The Incident & After’ or Shashi Despande’s *The Binding Vine* women are subjected to patriarchal violence.

Most of these writers seem to point out that instead of patriarchy owning up responsibility for such crimes of violence, the onus is on women. Hence questions are raised about what the woman was wearing and what time was she out of the house etc. Writers are trying to highlight how society perceives women’s sexuality as a threat and how these attention-diverting tactics are used by society to shift the blame. An example is Shashi Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine* where Kalpana, the young girl who is raped, her own mother feels put to shame, when she realizes that the only photograph of Kalpana that she has, shows her daughter sporting bright clothes and lipstick. She even voices her misgivings about what the police would have to say to such a photograph. Besides, people would ask why she was out of the house so late in the evening.  

28 Such episodes where writers show doubts being cast about the
women’s morality by the society around her abound in most writing, whether it is fiction like this novel or non-fiction like Mala Sen’s *Bandit Queen*, where Phoolan is blamed for her rape and her reputation as a loose woman is held to be her doom.

The writers seem to be asking the question that most women ask: why cannot they move around safely at any point of time? Why are they not safe in public places? In 1992, a march addressing this issue was organized by a number of women’s groups. Calling it ‘take back the night’, they were protesting this circumscribing of women’s spatial freedom. Going back to Deshpande’s *Binding Vine*, we see how the writer through the use of dramatic irony wishes to show that danger does not lurk for young girls only in the dark, unknown streets but is right under the nose. The revelation that her own trusted, father-like figure, her uncle is responsible for the heinous crime comes as a shock. And deliberately so, as the writer wishes to awaken society to this awareness that for a woman it is hard to find a place that is secure.

The writers who have highlighted the theme of rape seem to be conscious of the fact that pain is a very subjective experience but ironically the collective experience of such individuals who suffer this traumatic experience becomes the leit motif of subaltern pain. As Lauren Berlant in the essay “The subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy & Politics” argues, subaltern pain becomes a “public form”, because its outcome is to make you readable, for others”. In a very astute understanding of the victim and how pain unites them into an identity, he says, “this is perhaps, why activists from identity politics generally assume pain as the only sign readable, across hierarchies of social life”.

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Thus, the pain of rape victims across, caste, class, cultural barriers, unites them with the pain and shame society associates with them. Perhaps most writers seem to be conscious of how a body of writing can address this subaltern pain and bring it under the umbrella of gender politics to unite women from all over the world.

Robin West in her work on *Narrative, Authority & Law*, feels the need to deprivatize women’s structurally induced pain. She also draws attention to the need to reformulate laws and design them to give justice and render them as quick and effective as possible. Only this can ensure that women are treated as subjects and not as objects. And we know that at the root of the crime of rape is the objectification of women by society across cultures. As early as in 1981, UNESCO’s book *Violence and its Causes*, reveals in an essay by Elise Boulding that the institution of rape is based on the treatment of women as objects and as non-person.

That women’s bodies are treated as patriarchy’s property has been spelt out even in the traditional classics in Indian culture. Yudhistira even after becoming a slave to the Kauravas in the “Sabha Parva” still holds rights over his wife and can put her at stake in the dice game. Pratibha Ray in her novel *Draupadi* seems to raise this issue of objectification of women by societies. The dilemma of Draupadi being compelled to marry five brothers arises precisely because Kunti is told by Yudhistra that they have brought a precious ‘thing’ and Kunti asks them to share that laurel. The trauma that Draupadi bears all her life and the humiliation that she suffers throughout in being shared by five husbands is the result of her objectification.

Thus, the crucial question regarding representation of women is
who is representing them and how. Traditionally, women have been
treated as signs men use to represent meaning in a male world. As
anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss has pointed out, women are no more
than boundary-markers for men. They are used as a means of barter, and
to confirm men’s ‘normality’. Thus, who represents these women and
how is an important question.

The theme of violence against women in post-colonial Indian
writing then is a serious theme in aesthetic representation. In earlier
writing, it is brushed under the carpet by writers or addressed in a cursory
manner from the point of view of the male gaze. Thus, an attempt is made
in this body of writing to rectify the refractory practices of male writing.

Representing the subaltern voice of the victims of violence and
rape then is the problematic writers are faced with. Can the writer
accurately address the issues in the mind and heart of the victim or can
the writer make the subaltern speak, then is the crucial question. Spivak’s
comment about the impossibility of speech for the subaltern is true to an
extent but rules out all representation that writers undertake to give voice
to the disempowered. If representation is possible through self
referentiality alone, that too leaves the matter unresolved. If the self-
referential discourse alone is the remedy, that too is problematic as the
free individual is also a complex of influences and is as Rey Chow feels
already a “representation of the changing conceptions of power”.

We realize how the subaltern subjects (whatever limited attributes
of a subject she has) is thus compelled to borrow the voice of the post
colonial educated, middle – class writer. And to a great extent the
narratorial voice does justice to the theme of rape. Whether it is the
Naxalite tribal, Dopdi, the bhadramahila like Romita in *Dahan*; *Mallika* in *The Fallen Man*; Draupadi in Pratibha Rays’ novel, of the title, writers have tried to probe and speak in the voice of the subject. However, each writer’s writing and representation has its own emphases.

The eclectic methodology of this study emerges from the very nature of this crime. There are individual characteristics that differentiate one instance of sexual aggression from another. Besides psychological, sociological and economic factors in their own way contribute to this crime. The crime lends itself to a multivariate analysis. No single determinant can be looked upon as responsible for this crime. Not all profiles of rapists are identical. Therefore exploring the possible catalysts for this crime is the thrust of this study, through the medium of literature of course.

Writers, in their handling of the theme of rape seem to have in mind two emphases:

(a) the contextual emphasis

(b) the conceptual emphasis

The contextual emphasis has to do with the individual’s narrative of violation, nemesis for the protagonist and its outcome. The conceptual emphasis seeks a redefinition of rape as a means of control and subordination of women in the hands of patriarchy. Thus, the individual woman’s violation is used to negotiate and map the wider implications of rape in general. So the microcosmic trauma lived by Mallika, Draupadi or Smita etc. is the macrocosmic narrative of trauma of the whole gender
and its victimization by this gender related violence. These narratives then fill up the larger collage of gender – triggered violence that haunts society.